

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A RED SISTER.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE sun went down a great ball of lurid fire behind the young trees in the park. As its flames died out of the stormily-purple west, rugged masses of cloud spread themselves athwart the night sky. No refreshing coolness came with the darkness. Every window in the Castle stood open; but air there was none, outside the house, nor within.

"Don't trouble about me, Herrick," said Lois, as for a moment the two stood together in the hall before separating for the night; "I am not in the least tired. Ah, if you would only let me sit up! If I go to bed I shall not be able to sleep."

Herrick had decided that the unseemliness of a discussion between him and his mother at such a time was a sufficient reason for yielding to her wish that Lois should be kept out of his grandfather's room. Furthermore, he had decided that, all things considered, it would be better for Lois to return to Summerhill on the following morning. Later on he would know well enough how to make good her position in the house as that of his future wife, and every living soul, mother included, should be taught to respect it. But for the present he resolved that not so much as a jarring look between his mother and himself should ruffle the serene atmosphere that ought to surround a death-bed.

He had spent the twilight hours

now in one sick-room, now in another, and anon in brief five minutes in the library dictating telegrams to the manager of the Wrexford mines. Now, as eleven o'clock chimed, the Castle was beginning to settle down into quiet, and he had crept away to say a farewell word to Lois, and to bid her go to rest for the night. He felt sorely at a loss how to refuse her request without betraying his mother's ill-will towards her.

"If you sat up, darling, you could be of no possible use," was all he could find to say.

Lois did not speak for a moment. She was standing immediately beneath one of the swinging bronze lamps which lighted the hall, the soft yellow light falling full upon the upturned, dimpled face, the straying gold of her hair, the tremulous mouth. The simple, infantine face might have been that of a child praying to have the moon given it for a toy, rather than that of one making a request whose granting or refusal might carry life or death with it.

She clasped her hands together imploringly.

"Oh Herrick, Herrick," she cried, "why won't you let me go near him? I beg, I entreat you, let me see him once again!"

Tears ran down her cheeks; her voice gave way with her last word.

Herrick was greatly distressed.

"If I could I would, darling, you may be sure; but for some reason or other my mother——" Here he checked himself sharply, then added: "You shall see him the first thing in the morning before you go back to Summerhill, I promise you

that. Dr. Scott told me only a minute ago that he had slightly rallied, and he thought that he might have a fairly good night."

Lois guessed at the words he had so sharply held back.

"Tell me, Herrick," she said, in a low voice, "why does Lady Joan wish to keep me away from him? He seemed so happy to have me beside him. He held my hand so tightly! I can hear his poor weak voice now, saying: 'Do not leave me, my child.'"

Here, again, tears choked her words.

Herrick's calmness nearly gave way.

"Do not add to my anxieties to-night, Lois," he said. "Believe me, I feel already as if my brains were leaving me. Will you take my word for it that my grandfather is much better left alone with his usual attendant for the night? Dr. Scott has said, more than once, that the slightest divergence of routine might be bad for him. I beg of you, go upstairs to rest now; to-morrow, before you go back to Summerhill——"

Lois suddenly laid her hand on his arm.

"Herrick," she pleaded, "if you will not let me go inside his room to-night, will you let me sit outside his door in the corridor? I will be so quiet, I will scarcely breathe. Lady Joan shall not know I am there—— Oh, do, do let me!"

She clasped her hands over his arm, her tears falling in a shower now.

Herrick grew more and more distressed and perplexed.

"Give me a reason, Lois, for such a strange request," he said.

But he might as well have asked Lois to fetch him down one of the stars at once. Her eyes drooped.

"I wish I could," she said, falteringly. "I can't tell you why, but I feel as if I were called upon to—take care of him to-night——"

"Oh, Lois, do you not think that my mother and Parsons and I are enough to take care of my dear old grandfather till morning? I shall sit in the dressing-room—that is, you know, the room between my father's and grandfather's rooms—and shall be going from one room to the other all night. If anything should happen, if my grandfather should express any wish to see you, I promise you faithfully you shall be sent for at once."

But Lois was not to be satisfied even with this promise. Her entreaties grew

more and more vehement. Might she sit in the hall, if not in the corridor? Might she come down once in the middle of the night for a report as to how things were going on?

Herrick had to feign a sternness he did not feel to silence her. If she could have given him the shadow of a reason for her request, he would have attached more importance to it. As it was, the thought in his mind was that she was overdone, hysterical, and was attaching a significance to trifles which did not of rights belong to them.

"Sleep will be the best thing for you to-night, dear; by-and-by you shall help me bear the brunt of everything," he said with a decision that ended the matter. "You have had a terribly fatiguing day—the intense heat, and the thunder in the air is telling on you. Don't you know you told me you could feel a storm coming a week before it broke?"

"Thunder in the air! is it that I feel?" said Lois vaguely, dreamily. But she made no farther opposition to Herrick's wishes. In good truth, accustomed as she had ever been to yield submission to the will of others, it had cost her not a little to assert her own wishes in the way she had already done.

There followed "one long, strong kiss" between the lovers, a kiss that could not have had more of truth and passion in it if they could have turned over a page of Time's volume and read what lay before them in the future.

Then Lois went her way up the broad oak staircase to the room which had been assigned to her on the upper floor; and Herrick went back to the sick-rooms.

His last word to her was a repetition of his promise, that before she went back to Summerhill the next morning she should see and say good-bye to his grandfather.

He stood at the foot of the staircase watching the dainty little figure, with its flushed, tearful face and straying golden hair, till it disappeared at the turn of the stairs; taking it as much for granted that he and she would meet on the morrow as he did that the sun would rise and the shadows flee away.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SHE looks as if another soul had taken possession of her body."

Lois's words flashed into Herrick's mind as he entered the corridor leading to his

grandfather's quarters, and found Lady Joan standing on the threshold of his father's room, with a look on her face he had never seen there before.

In view of the coming night-watch, she had exchanged her tight-fitting dress for some long, dark, clinging robe; round her head and shoulders she had wrapped a grey shawl of light texture; from beneath this her eyes looked out at him, large and glittering, with a strange light in them. A prophetess of old time, a daughter of Jerusalem sitting beside the waters of Babylon, and gathering herself together to pronounce a curse upon the race which had conquered and enslaved her Fatherland, might have had much such a look shining out of her eyes and settling in rigid lines about her mouth.

"I have been waiting—waiting here to speak to you, Herrick," she said, and her voice sounded to him hard and unnatural, "to make arrangements for the night. The quieter these rooms are kept during the night hours, the better for the invalids. Dr. Scott I have already dismissed—"

"Dr. Scott dismissed!" interrupted Herrick, astonished beyond measure. "Why, he is the one we may need most of all!"

"You need not doubt my capacity for managing the routine of a sick-room. Dr. Scott himself told me that there was scarcely a likelihood of any change taking place in your father's condition before the morning; so I suggested to him that he should take his rest during the early part of the night, and I have promised to have him called at daybreak. I have had a mattress placed for him in one of the sitting-rooms—the first at the farther end of the corridor, so that in case of need he can be easily aroused."

"It seems to me," said Herrick, steadily eyeing his mother, "that if rest is to be thought of to-night for any one, it should be for you—"

"My place is here," interrupted Lady Joan, with great decision; "no one can fill it, no one shall fill it."

She added the last words excitedly, and Herrick, knowing at what terrible tension his mother's nerves must be held at that moment, forbore to press the point farther.

"Of course, you will have Parsons and Jervis—the newly-engaged nurse—" in attendance?" he asked. "And I will remain in the dressing-room, and will be in and out both rooms all night. But still—"

"I beg you will do nothing of the sort," interrupted Lady Joan—Herrick would have thought angrily, if anger at such a time had seemed to him possible—"you would be greatly in the way in the dressing-room; it is required by the nurses as a waiting-room for all sorts of purposes. These rooms must be kept in perfect quiet. It would be far wiser if you followed Dr. Scott's example, and went to rest during the early part of the night."

"I—rest! with my father lying at death's door!" was all that Herrick said in reply, but the tone in which he spoke showed that he had not by a long way attained the perfect control over his feelings which his mother exhibited.

"Why not?" she asked. "Two such sick-rooms as these cannot possibly require the attendance of more than three women. The nursing duties are next to nothing!"

It was only too true—the nursing duties were "next to nothing." The administration of an opiate, the renewal of bandages steeped in aconite, was all that could be required of nurse or doctor in John Gaskell's sick-room.

In old Mr. Gaskell's room the duties required of the nurse were scarcely heavier. Nourishment or a stimulant of some sort had to be administered hourly to the feeble and tractable invalid, but beyond this nothing could be done.

Herrick laid his hand on his mother's arm.

"Mother, say no more," he said, gently, but with a decision as great as her own. "No living soul could keep me away from my father to-night, so pray give up the attempt. I will fall in with any routine you may think best for the night-watch; but here I am, and here I shall remain until—"

Again he broke off.

It was unintentional that he spoke as if his mother had, with deliberate purpose, done her utmost to keep him from his father's bedside.

Lady Joan looked at him for a moment.

"The Gaskell strong will again," was the thought in her heart. Aloud she said:

"If your mind is made up, I waste time in endeavouring to alter it. As I have already told you, I wish both sick-rooms kept in perfect quiet; divergence of routine in your grandfather's room, Dr. Scott tells me, will have a bad effect on him, and it will be best for him to be left till morning entirely to the care of Parsons,

who knows his requirements. In this room, as I have already told you, your presence can scarcely be needed. If you choose to sit up, therefore, I should prefer your remaining in the room opening off this on the other side—the billiard-room, that is."

This then was the arrangement of the suite of seven rooms on that memorable night. Dr. Scott, with his mattress, occupied the first of the suite—the one at the extreme end of the corridor. Herrick, in compliance with Lady Joan's wish, took possession of the second—his grandfather's billiard-room. John Gaskell, attended by his wife and Jervis the nurse, lay in the third. The fourth room, old Mr. Gaskell's dressing-room, which intervened between the two sick-rooms, was left empty for the use of the nurses, also in compliance with Lady Joan's wish. In the fifth room lay old Mr. Gaskell. Two sitting-rooms followed in succession, both untenanted. Each of these rooms, in addition to the doors by which they communicated with each other, owned to a third door opening direct into the corridor. This corridor communicated at one end with the big inner hall of the house, and at the other led by a staircase to the upper floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

HERRICK placed a chair for himself just within the billiard-room, leaving the door ajar, so that the slightest sound in the sick-room could be heard by him.

He leaned back in his chair, a prey to the sad thoughts which his familiar surroundings summoned forth with relentless hand. What pleasant games of billiards he and his father had enjoyed at that table in the after-dinner-hour, while the old grandfather looking on, gave canny counsel, now to one side, now to the other. Great Heavens! how long ago it seemed now! He could have fancied that years, not days, had elapsed since he last heard the old man say in his thin, quavering voice, "Play with caution, laddie, one chance missed gives two to your adversary;" or listened to his father's hearty tones saying, "Bravo, Herrick, I never made a better break than that at my best."

A passionate longing rose up in his heart, there and then to look once more on those loved faces; to touch once again those kindly hands, while yet the warmth of life remained to them. He repressed it with the thought of his mother's evident wish that

he should keep away from the sick-rooms during the night. It was a strange wish on her part no doubt; but still, as it was her wish, he felt bound to respect it. As before in the day, so now he resolved that his mother should not be called upon through him to bear any—the slightest—additional heart-ache to those she now suffered. "After all," his thoughts ran, "for all practical purposes he was as near his father one side of the door as the other." It might be that the solution to his mother's apparently inexplicable conduct lay in the fact that a sudden mood of jealous love had taken possession of her; and she wished no living soul to share with her the last watch beside her dying husband. Second thoughts however refused to be satisfied with so simple an explanation. As long as he could remember, his father and mother had always seemed on a fairly amicable and friendly footing towards each other; but of love of the sort that breeds jealousy, there had not been a jot.

With his mother thus in the foreground of his thoughts, other things in her conduct that day struck as it were uncomfortable key-notes. It was strange that Lois's child-like instincts had appeared to meet the old grandfather's at this point, and that both should shrink from Lady Joan as if—well as if she were unfit for the onerous duties which had thus suddenly devolved upon her.

"Well, what wonder!" he thought, "if she were unfit for such duties. What wonder if she had strangely altered during the past twenty-four hours; he himself had felt older by at least a dozen years, and her frame, her brain were not to be compared with his in youth and strength—ah!"

Herrick's thoughts here broke off abruptly as a sudden ugly suspicion crossed his mind. What if the true solution of the mystery was to be found in the fact that her brain had not been strong enough to bear the terrible strain put upon it that day, and that her reason even now tottered in the balance!

Ugly as the suspicion was, Herrick forced himself to look it in the face.

And the longer he looked at it the more likely it seemed to grow. It gave a show of reason alike to Lois's and the old grandfather's nameless terrors. They had noted a change in Lady Joan which his pre-occupied mind had debarred him from perceiving, and had shrunk from her in a manner unintelligible to themselves.

Herrick, still leaning back in his chair, covered his eyes with one hand; this, not to shut out the terrible embodiment which his fears had thus suddenly assumed, but the better to answer the practical question: "What could he do for the best? How was he to meet this unexpected emergency?"

One thing speedily made itself plain to him: his mother must be watched as much for her own sake as for the sake of those helpless ones left in her charge.

"I must keep eyes and ears on the alert to-night," he said to himself. "And remember that I am keeping watch not over two, but over three."

It was an appalling thought; his brain seemed to grow dizzy beneath it. A clock in a corner of the room chimed the hour—one o'clock. From different quarters of the Castle the same hour was repeated, and then, to Herrick's fancy, a great stillness seemed to fall upon the house, a stillness which, combined with the sultriness of the air, seemed to proclaim that the storm must be almost upon them. Not a leaf stirred in the outside darkness, nor so much as a buzzing fly or gnat whirled in the hot air. Herrick, with his hand still covering his eyes, felt oppressed and stifled by the intense silence which, like some heavy pall, seemed to overhang the house. The heat was almost beyond endurance. Was it possible, he wondered, that every one of the windows was open? He thought he would softly make the round of that suite of rooms, and see if a little more air was not to be had.

Before, however, he could put his resolve into execution, tired nature asserted itself—as well it might, after the heavy strain it had that day been called upon to endure—his head sank back upon the cushions of his high-backed chair, his arm dropped limply to his side, and he fell into a heavy though uneasy slumber.

WAITRESSES.

THE subject of waitresses is rather a wide one, and extends through a varied social stratification. Each neat-handed Phyllis that attends to one's little wants is, in point of fact, a waitress. And, as a rule, how neatly and deftly does the British waitress perform her office! We all remember the pretty picture, which has had various imitations more or less successful, "Sherry, sir?" where the waitress is bring-

ing in a decanter and biscuit. For my own part I had much rather be attended by such a waitress than by a gorgeous flunkey.

When Coningsby first meets Sidonia in D'Israeli's charming novel, it is in a little country inn, where they had taken refuge from an impending storm. They both admire the perfect grace with which the waitress lays the table-cloth. Sidonia explains that she does it so well because she knows her business perfectly, and is conscious that she does.

I knew a big house in which the noble Earl would not allow a single indoor-servant to be a male. He, his guests, and his family were all served by a bevy of maidens, who had a very pretty special uniform. At breakfast his own daughters would gracefully transform themselves into waitresses, and attend to the wants and wishes of their elders and their friends.

But I am now writing about waitresses in a more limited and restricted sense. In the course of the last generation there has been a great multiplication of the class of waitresses. One is very glad that, in these days of crowded competition, so much work of this kind is thrown open to young women. The more we find useful and paying work for women, the better for themselves and for society at large; and thus much has become a social truism. The waitresses now constitute a large and increasing class. Messrs. Spiers and Pond are said to have about two thousand waitresses, and two thousand waiters. The upshot frequently is, that a waiter marries a waitress. When I speak of waitresses as a class, I must remember that it is a class recruited from most classes. Some of them are the daughters of professional people, and so on through various grades of society. There is not much cohesion and combination among these young ladies; and among the various social developments of our time I am afraid that there is very little done for their special good. I think that their wealthier and more cultivated sisters might show them some greater measure of sympathy and friendship.

I have been admitted to the honour of some confidential talks with several young ladies of this persuasion. One Sunday morning I had such a talk with a waitress at one of the stations of the Underground Railway. She was the daughter of a solicitor, or farmer, if I remember aright, and was one of too many daughters. She

determined that she would go out and earn her own living; and though her parents did not like it, they did not object, as certainly it was the most sensible thing that she could do. She thought she would rather be a waitress than a governess. She considered that she would have more leisure and more independence. At first she did not like it at all. But she told me that she came to like it very much. She said it was so nice to save her parents expense, to be her own mistress, to buy her own dresses, and so on. Nothing could tempt her to go back. The hours were long; but, except at certain hurried parts of the day, they were not fatiguing. She had certain holidays—not too many—almost entirely consisting of alternate Sundays, or parts of Sundays, in which she secured as much rest and change as possible. She had the advantage of having friends and relations in London, so she was under good protection, and had some pleasant society.

I had a talk with another young waitress on the Underground, whose history was on the whole hardly so pleasing. The first business of a waitress is to be honest, nice-mannered, and nice-looking. It is rather difficult to obtain a combination of all these. The first is absolutely necessary, and we have got what approximation can be obtained towards the other requisites. Then if a girl has her head well screwed on her shoulders, that is to say if she can keep accounts, keep them quite faithfully and accurately, and perhaps has some knowledge of book-keeping, she can make what little way is to be made in her profession. But it is surprising what a number of girls are not to be trusted with business details. They are honest enough in all conscience, but they have a poor head for figures. They do not put down all the items; and they sometimes fail to add them up correctly. The young lady whom I am now mentioning was a very average specimen, or, rather below the average. She could only wait; her little head could not carry any business details. She was not at all satisfied with the wages she received, and, indeed, it was little more than would serve her for dress, and a very moderate amount of pocket-money. Then she had a very special grievance to complain of. She had to pay for all breakages, and the breakages came to something considerable out of the scanty allowance. She did not mind paying for anything which she had broken

herself; but very often glasses were shaken down by the passage of trains underneath the refreshment-rooms, and she thought it hard that she should have to pay for them. It can easily be understood, however, that young girls being liable to be careless, it is necessary to have some strict rule to make them careful. She also spoke of some circumstances which were extremely creditable to her employers. Thus she had rheumatic fever after she had entered on her engagement, which is generally a long and costly illness. Her employers had her nursed and taken care of all through her illness, until she was able to resume her work again, and were quite content to incur all such loss and trouble on her account.

Indeed, from what I heard concerning the firm, which is the largest concerned with this kind of business, I perceived that the waitresses are well looked after. There is always a certain amount of judicious surveillance. They are each housed in comfortable quarters under the superintendence of a lady who has come from their own ranks; and to become such a superintendent is a good piece of promotion. Cases of misconduct are very rare; but, of course, in so large a number, they occur sometimes. The fare is good; in fact, the young people may freely help themselves to whatever they like; but it is not found that there is any waste or extravagance. Any little extravagance there may be is in the matter of dress, and this comes out of their own pockets. There is an immense number of applications for employment, the work being considered light, easy, respectable, and in some respects agreeable. A register-book is kept of all applications, and approved candidates are called in as they may be wanted for vacancies. Photographs are kept of all the girls employed; and a little history is attached to each name. There are searching enquiries made before an engagement is formed, and there must be references and testimonials. Of course the great difficulty that exists in relation to these interesting young women is their position in regard to young men. In their own interest the girls require to be watched and protected. Some time ago there was a ukase issued that no shaking of hands should be permitted across the counter. It was found expedient to introduce a cautious limitation of this kind. Of course young men up to a certain point should be encouraged. Girls like a little society, and

they have to keep in view their ultimate settlement in life. Young men are also large consumers; and, within a certain margin, their consumption of edibles and drinkables is to be encouraged. Still, it is quite possible to have too much of them. There are in London a number of young men who are "loafers," who hang about public bars so long that they become nuisances, who pay overwhelming attention to young ladies, and sometimes involve them in unsatisfactory love affairs. When a chronic flirtation is established, perhaps there is not a sufficient amount of care taken of the amount of glasses of liquids which are partaken by their thirsty admirers. However, the proprietors of such places would regard with great dislike men who were at all likely to mar the happiness or good reputation of the girls they employ. There is often much more care taken of the young ladies than the young ladies are aware of. Beyond the heads of each representative station there is a certain amount of inspection and observation carried on by employers.

When a girl has too many friends at her station, and is perhaps getting talked about, she finds herself quietly removed to another station several miles away up or down the line. When undesirable acquaintances still follow her, she is offered a situation some hundred miles down in the country, where she must either go or leave altogether. There is an extreme reluctance that a girl should leave, except at her own choice. Again, changes are sometimes made with a kindly view to a girl's own wishes, or her health. I once saw a tabulated register-book of these young waitresses, in which mention was made of each locality where they had been employed. Thus a girl may be found suffering in health from the close confinement and late hours of a London bar. She is sent into the country, perhaps to the bracing air of the north, or of some sea-side resort. Perhaps she does not improve, and a milder climate is thought good for her. So a position is found, or made for her in some healthy climate suitable for her case, such as Torquay, Penzance, Hastings, where it is considered that she will have the best hopes of recovery.

Our waitresses, indeed, are a peculiar class. They have their good qualities, and also the defects of their qualities. Thanks to the School Board, and the cheap press, there is now more education among them

than used to be the case. Still there is not much continuous mental improvement among them; but I expect this is not much the case, except for a small minority in any order of society. Your modern waitress is quick, courteous, and observant. She has a gift of small talk, which she can exercise when she has a good opening for it. Occasionally she is slightly given to slang.

The waitresses are very well supplied by their admirers with the light railway literature; and they have often hours of morning and afternoon leisure in which they may read if they like; but they are not very often so disposed. I am afraid that this way of living in some way unfits them for the monotonous duties of domestic life, when they will have no constant change of faces. And to that domestic life the gift of repartee is not the most valuable that a woman can possess. As a rule waitresses are a very nice set of young people; but there are exceptions which prove the rule.

Just out of Algiers there is a pretty valley constantly visited by tourists, which is called the Valley of La Belle Sauvage. "Murray's Handbook" tells the story of the "Handsome Savage." It appears that shortly after the French occupation of Algiers, this untamed young woman kept a café in the Happy Valley, and was so noted for giving what is technically called "the rough side of her tongue," that her region is everywhere known as the Valley La Belle Sauvage.

Occasionally these interesting young people indulge in a certain amount of "cheek." I remember being at a theatre one evening and asking for the refreshment of a brandy and soda. The nymph of the counter—and a very pretty one she was—was no adept in her profession. She first put in the soda-water, and then the strong water, and then added the ice. I ventured to suggest to her that the reverse process would in general be more acceptable, and would certainly have been so to myself. She did not receive my humble hint at all graciously. She turned unpleasantly red in the face, and said that if I did not like it I might leave it. Accordingly I left it, and went back to my place. I was one of the last that night to leave the house, and as I passed the counter I saw the pretty waitress looking very dejected. I told her that I hoped she was no loser by the little transaction. She looked very sadly, and said that she

would have to pay a shilling out of her own pocket. I handed it over to her, and was happy to read her a great moral lesson at so small a cost.

Then, again, the question of "tips" to waitresses is one that suggests itself. I like waitresses to be tipped. The girls can make a little money go such a long way. Whatever doubts there may be about the propriety of tipping porters at railway-stations, there can be none about the propriety of tipping the waitresses in the refreshment-rooms of the stations. The question is whether we can summon up enough courage to tip such gorgeous creatures as the young ladies at Swindon and Crewe. It is very hard to do the correct thing in tips. Most people give either too much, or too little. I knew an Oxford man who stayed a good deal at hotels. He formulated a great principle on the subject :

"When I have been staying at an inn, if the waitress is plain, I would give her half-a-crown, and if she is pretty, half-a-sovereign."

I went one day into a fashionable confectioner's shop with a young man. He put down a sovereign in payment, and in his change there was a half-sovereign. He pushed the gold coin towards the girl who had waited on us, and said, "For yourself." The girl coloured and said: "No, thank you, sir; it is too much." When my change was given, there was a threepenny—that coin so valuable at collections—and I said: "Please keep that." She smiled brightly, and took it, and thanked me. The girl's good instinct had told her what it was best to do in both cases.

In France the tips are as variable, but they are not so good as in England. In a country place, at a little auberge, the other day, I had to pay the landlord's daughter, Suzanne, forty centimes for a "petit verre." I gave her half a franc, and said that I wanted no change. The mother thanked me, and said that Suzanne had received a great many tips—they must have been much better than mine—and had bought seven or eight sheep. I told the blushing Suzanne what a treasure she and her sheep would be to her future husband.

There is a considerable difference between the London waitress and her country cousins of the same class. In some respects the latter have an advantage. The stations and the hotels are much less busy. There are fewer trains, and they do not run so late. Indeed, it is found that

after an early hour it is not worth while to keep the refreshment-rooms open. At the hotels they close at eleven; and, below a certain number of population, at ten, instead of half-past twelve as in town. Instead of sleeping at the station, the country waitress has her own house in town, or at least lives with her own friends. She has much more time at her disposal during business hours for reading and working. She takes what part she can in the limited social life of the place; she has her accustomed place in church, and is perhaps a Sunday-school teacher, or belongs to the choir. The London waitress knows comparatively little of this sort of life. She makes her friends, indeed, but in many cases not very wisely. It is much to be wished that ladies who aim at good and useful influence would cultivate kindly relations with these girls, and ask them to their home, give them nice introductions and help them with books and music. Such ladies are often kind enough to the very poor, and will even do a certain amount of "slumming;" but they are very shy in making acquaintances with those whom they perhaps consider just to belong to the very fringe of society. Perhaps, with their nice manners, jewellery, and dresses, they may seem perilously to impinge on the social grade above them. This, however, is a mistake. The waitress is shrewd enough to know a real lady when she meets her, and will appreciate her kindness; and the other would often find a real lady in the waitress. Those young people often require a sister's kind guidance and sympathy. It is so very easy for them to pick up acquaintances, if they were ever so shy and reticent; as is often the case, it would be difficult for them not to do so. The laws of social etiquette are so inexorable, as a rule, that there are many young men in London who have no female acquaintances, or few and scattered. But the cold crust of etiquette is very soon broken over a counter. A man going to his place of business may drop in for a chat, morning and evening, for months together. This often gives a nice girl a chance of establishing herself in life. Often they throw away the chance. The steady clerk, the honest tradesman, is often despised, when compared with the smart young man with sham jewellery, loud voice, and thirsty propensities. But the one means business, while the other may mean nothing.

I have known several cases of waitresses

who have made very good matches, and have been called upon to fill somewhat high positions in society. But on the whole their public position has much less to do with their private interests than might generally be imagined. They generally marry in their own line of life, or among their own friends and connections.

I can here give rather a pretty story of a waitress and her young fortunes. She was a pretty little girl, hardly seventeen, and was at one of the metropolitan stations. Enter to her, as they say in the play-books, a middle-aged gentleman, very hot, and in a very great hurry; takes a tumbler of claret and lemonade as befitting the summer season, and precipitately disappears on hearing the ringing of a bell, which proclaimed that his train is due. He disappeared, but in his hurry he left behind him a pocket-book which he had taken out in order to discharge his reckoning. Now that pocket-book was a very important one. It contained some sovereigns, and a roll of bank-notes, and also some business papers even more important than the bank notes. The merchant retraced his steps and went to every place he had visited in the course of the day, and he had been to a great many; but his memory was an utter blank in regard to the refreshment-room. He put an advertisement in the papers; but waitresses do not read advertisements unless they are looking for a situation for self, or friends. But one day this gentleman managed to find himself in this station, which, by the way, was not in his normal line; one which he visited very rarely, and, as it were, only by accident. Directly he entered the room the pretty girl at the counter recognised him, and came up to the little table where he was sitting—it now being late in the autumn—drinking a cup of tea.

"I think, sir," she said, "that you left a pocket-book here some months ago."

"Indeed I did; and I shall be particularly glad to hear of it again."

The girl had her wits about her. It would not do to give the pocket-book to the first stranger that claimed it after she had mentioned her find. At the same time, she had a recollection of the person to whom she spoke, which had caused her to address him.

"What sort of a pocket-book was it?" she asked. "And what did it contain?"

"It had three sovereigns in it, and five

five-pound notes, and some business papers, bills of exchange."

"It is all right. I have got your pocket-book," she said; and she went to a little desk and produced it.

It was all right to the minutest detail. There were the gold and notes, and the other precious papers, a little silver besides, and half-a-dozen postage-stamps.

"Young lady," he said, "I am very much obliged. Do you know that I have offered a reward in the newspapers for the discovery of this pocket-book?"

"I did not know it. I am very glad that I kept it for you. I do not want a reward."

She said this; but, being only a human waitress, I dare say the vision of a bonnet, or a dress, flashed on her imagination.

"Now, will you write down your name and where your mother lives in this pocket-book of mine?"

"I have no mother; but I have an aunt, and a lot of little cousins."

And she gave an address in Walbrook.

Some time after this the gentleman called upon the aunt, and said that he would be very pleased to send the girl to school for a few years, defray all possible expenses, and make himself responsible for securing her a livelihood afterwards.

The girl herself was not so pleased. She thought that school was only meant for little girls, and being a mature young woman of seventeen, she thought that she was much too old for it. But being assured that there were girls even older than that at the good and small finishing-school where he proposed to send her, she was wise enough to accept the offer, and cleverly availed herself of all the advantages which were set before her.

The merchant provided for her future by persuading her to marry him. She made him a good wife, and they "lived happy for ever afterwards," as if they belonged to a story-book.

ON GETTING OVER IT.

"Oh, he—or she—will get over it—never fear!"

The phrase is one of the commonest in use, which neither age can wither nor custom stale by constant repetition. Has some fair damsel been disappointed by the object of her affections? While she is bewailing her vanished hopes, her relations and friends privately take the opportunity

of discussing her present position and future prospects; usually concluding with the above prediction, which, it must be acknowledged, in nine cases out of ten comes true. Angelina, though sorely distressed by the inconstancy of Edwin, does get over it in the end. The roses return to her cheeks, and the brightness to her eyes. Instead of shunning society as at first, she once more takes her place in the ball-room, and on the tennis-court, the merriest of the merry throng. She has got over it.

We all remember that when our worthy friend Blank lost his young and lovely wife a year after his marriage, it was generally believed that he was rapidly following her to the grave, which seemed the only remaining refuge for his broken heart, so terrible was his grief. But that was thirty years ago, and to-day Blank, stout and rubicund, sits at the bottom of his table, facing his buxom second spouse, and joking with the blooming company of sons and daughters who have never thought of him save as the most jovial of fathers. There is no need now to pity him, or to ask whether he has forgotten the sorrow which once threatened to blight his whole life. No doubt about it, he has got over it.

And happily for mankind, ninety-nine people out of a hundred do "get over" the business losses, the illnesses, the bereavements, the mortifications which are in everybody's lot; though how, they hardly know. It is only one here and there who gives way beneath a crushing blow, and never recovers from it. Of course these things leave their scars; the hardening of the heart, the decrease of hopefulness, the unavailing regret; but for all that the man or woman goes on in the same routine, not shunning social duties, taking interest in, and even pleased with trifles; attentive to the claims of their profession, just as though they had never wept bitter tears beside the grave of an only child, or seen their one hope in life vanish into ruin. Their friends say, and they even acknowledge themselves, that they have "got over it."

It is nature's great law of Adjustment to Environment carried out in that most delicate of existing organisms, the human heart.

And it is well for humanity that it is so. For if widows always wore their weeds; if the mourners always went about the streets; if every girl who had been deserted by her lover took to solitude and

sighing; if every parent, who had met with ingratitude from his children, revenged himself by cursing the whole human race, it would be chaos-come-again with a vengeance, and "Ichabod" would have to be written over every achievement of human hands.

Poor old world! It has witnessed much tribulation and endless changes since it was first set spinning in space ever so many thousand years ago; and yet here it is to-day as fresh and green and beautiful as though the din of strife, and the silence of Death had never been known in it! It has survived wars, and famines, and pestilences; revolutions, and massacres, and inundations. Tyrants have devastated whole continents, putting entire nations to the sword to gratify their brutal thirst for blood. Religious fanatics have desolated it, murdering and torturing in the name of piety. And yet somehow it has got over it—lived through a Siege of Jerusalem, a Massacre of St. Bartholomew, a Thirty Years' War, a French Revolution, as though all these things mattered not one whit. Philosophical old world!

Heartless old world is the verdict of many worthy persons who, although they may have borne with great resignation the loss of many once near and dear to them, can never bring themselves to contemplate with equanimity the certainty that, when they themselves die, the universe will go on just the same, with no pause in any of the complex processes of nature. In fact, many people never really believe that such will be the case, but retain to the last a lurking conviction that their empty place can never be filled, their loss never made good, no matter how long the world may exist. Be not deceived, my friend. The planet which has recovered from the loss of a Socrates, a Raphael, a Shakespeare, an Isaac Newton, a David Livingstone, will also survive your departure, although you may think yourself the greatest statesman, the only poet, the sublimest orator extant. Even while the laurel-wreaths laid by loving hands upon your grave in Westminster Abbey are still quite fresh and green, you may be quite forgotten, and henceforth only a shadowy abstraction catalogued among the miscellaneous population of a biographical dictionary.

Even if the world should miss you a little at first, you may be missed without being mourned, as an unconscious humourist of the working-classes once expressed it

when a sympathising visitor asked her whether she was not very lonely in the absence of her children, who were all either dead or abroad.

"I miss them more than I want them!" the mother emphatically replied; and that epitaph might truthfully be written over nine-tenths of the Kings, Generals, and other great men whose loss has apparently left the world quite inconsolable. But do not be angry with me, my friend, for predicting that you may find oblivion soon. In your time you have survived so many griefs and disappointments that it is hardly reasonable to blame mankind at large for also getting over your loss. It is only the law of nature.

You remember that time when your pretty daughter Margaret's lover was drowned at sea a week before his wedding-day, and how for months she never smiled, and how you held anxious consultations with great doctors, and how you took your darling to Mentone and Torquay, and coaxed her to walk and drive with you, ceaselessly watching her from morning till night.

What a joyful day it was when you first became certain that the roses were returning to her cheeks! How glad you were to hear again her merry laugh of old, after all those long weeks of suspense! And when, in course of time, she found another lover and married him, did you repine, even when you knew that he was in every way less gifted and less loveable than the suitor she had lost? No; you beheld her in her bridal veil with a light heart, only glad that she had got over that early grief. Neither would you think of clouding her content by disparaging comparisons between her first and her second choice.

It was an awful blow to you, too, in your own youthful days, when you fancied you were born to be a great poet and teacher of the human race; and your unsympathetic father, instead of rejoicing in your genius, sternly bade you put all that rubbish away, and take a stool in the office of your uncle, the solicitor. How hard you thought him! How you loathed the dry-as-dust routine, the making out of clients' bills, the study of fusty law-books, the engrossing of tedious documents! What a wrench it was to have to turn to a lease when you would rather have been composing a sonnet; and how hateful you thought it of your uncle to confiscate the Shakespeare he found in your desk, and insist that law-books only should be admitted to that receptacle!

But in time you got over it. You began to find the law more interesting than at first; much about the same period that you grew weary of having all your carefully-copied verses perpetually returned by stony-hearted editors and publishers, with a curt "declined with thanks." In despair you sent your manuscripts to other distinguished poets, with humble petitions for their criticism and advice to a young literary aspirant; but when these great men condescended to return them—which was not always—they did so with the brief intimation that they never undertook to give an opinion upon manuscript verses, and could only say that at the present day the supply of poets greatly exceeded the demand. To be sure, your mother greatly admired your poems, as did your Aunt Sophia.

So, by little and little, the conviction was forced upon you that you were not likely to succeed as a poet, and could not hope to find bread-and-cheese by the profession of letters; while the law offered an easy means of subsistence all ready to your hand. You ceased to trouble unsympathetic editors with your effusions, and you only composed a sonnet at longer and longer intervals; and to-day, which sees you the most prosperous lawyer in your native town, you would be puzzled to give the titles, much less repeat the words of those compositions which you once thought would procure you immortality and Westminster Abbey. Bitter though that early disappointment was at the time, you have quite got over it, so that you can bear with equanimity the certainty that your name and fame will never penetrate now beyond your own town. Let other and younger men seek eagerly for the "bubble reputation" if they will; a comfortable home and an assured income are yours, which might not have been the case had you remained a follower of the Muses; for fame too often means empty pockets, as your father was once never weary of telling you.

It is fortunate for us at the present day that the spirit of the age induces, nay, almost compels us to refrain from loud and useless lamentations, like spoilt children, when anything goes wrong. Times have changed since Rousseau and Lord Byron brought melancholy into cultivation as a serious pursuit. Once the sentimental tear was dropped over the sorrows of Werther, and it was quite the thing for young ladies who had been crossed in love to pine away and die, be-

moaning their unhappy fate to the last. But now, instead of looking about for the most suitable location for our early grave when trouble comes, we promptly set about getting over it; and what we suffer we keep hidden in our own breasts from all the world. We know that by so doing we are taking the most effectual measures towards recovery; for to coddle and pet a grief is most fatal policy, and sure in the end to make it ten times worse. Every day a thousand little events and circumstances occur to assist in restoring our lost mental balance; and fresh interests, fresh friendships, fresh occupations arise in place of the blighted hopes of yore.

There is no grandeur in owning oneself defeated, no heroism in suicide—that last desperate resort of those who have been slighted by the world. We must all acknowledge that the truly courageous man is he who, after a rebuff, sets his teeth hard, clenches his fists, and pulls himself together once more for another grapple with his evil star, resolutely saying, "I shall get over it!"

Every great man's life is full of such episodes; if it were not, he would not deserve the title of "great." Talk not of individual temperament, of a naturally sanguine disposition, of the possession of extraordinary recuperative power as the secret of such heroism. It is not such mere accidents of birth which afford the best shield in the day of adversity.

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;

With thy wild wheel we go not up or down;

Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great!

MALINE'S CONFESSION.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. VERY DISAGREEABLE.

"I AM glad you have come in, Wilfred. I want to speak to you. Something very disagreeable has happened," said Mr. Caringham, the master of Everleigh Grange, to Wilfred Power, his ward and private secretary.

"I am sorry to hear that. What is it?" asked Power, a dark, good-looking man of about seven-and-twenty.

"That money you fetched from the bank this morning, I can't find it. I put it in this drawer. You know where I keep money, usually; and I had some other money—French notes; and the lot has gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed the other. "Do you mean that it has been stolen?"

"I don't want to use a word like that," replied Mr. Caringham, who was a mild, good-natured, and rather nervous man. "I should be very sorry to think the old Grange had a thief in it. But I'm almost sure I put the money in this drawer."

"I know you did," answered Power; "I saw you do it. There were two rouleaux of gold and some loose sovereigns—about eighty pounds in all—and a few notes."

"I thought you were here. Well, it is gone. I suppose I forgot to lock the drawer. I really ought to trust these things to you; you are so much more thoughtful than I am. Anyway, when I came in about an hour ago, I found the drawer unlocked; and when I looked for the money, I couldn't find it. It is very disagreeable."

"Disagreeable!" repeated the other. "It is a great deal worse than disagreeable. But have you looked everywhere? I suppose you did not take the money out afterwards and put it anywhere?"

"No. Besides, I have been out nearly all the time."

"What time did you discover the loss?"

"About an hour ago—that would be about six o'clock."

"Well, it is very extraordinary. I was working here, looking into these papers about Meadowley Farm, until lunch; and I came back after lunch, and did not leave the room until past four o'clock, when I walked over to Meadowley to get some more particulars of the stock. So it must have happened between four and six o'clock. Had we not better question the servants?"

"No, no," replied Mr. Caringham. "I would not for the world have it get about the place that we have a thief here. Leave things alone, and, if we keep our eyes open, something will probably show where the money has gone; and then we can quietly get rid of whoever the person may be," he said, avoiding the word thief. "Never mind the money. I had no right to be so careless as to leave the drawer open. It serves me right."

"You must tell Miss Caringham," said Power. "It will be necessary for every one to be careful."

"I'd rather not; girls do chatter so abominably. But I suppose you are right, and that Maline ought to be put on her guard. Here she comes, I think."

A horse cantered quickly up the drive,

and a moment afterwards a girl's voice was heard calling :

"Papa, papa, where are you?"

The library door was opened by a quick hand, and a bright young girl of about twenty ran in, looking bewitchingly pretty in her habit, her cheeks flushed with rapid riding, and her fair hair slightly disarranged.

"Oh, papa, I am nearly out of breath. I had to ride so fast, and dear old Ruby was so tiresome and would not canter. It was all either joggle or rush; and at last I was obliged to let her have her head and gallop home. I was afraid I should be late. I couldn't get out till very nearly six o'clock, for I was in here, and that novel I was reading positively chained me down to your chair there. People ought not to be allowed to write books that keep other people from going for their ride at a proper time, ought they? But it was very much your fault, too, Mr. Power," said the girl, glancing mischievously at him, "because I couldn't get in here till four o'clock. But," she broke off, suddenly, looking at them both, "what is the matter? You both look as grave as deaf mutes. I'm not very late, am I? Not too late to be forgiven, am I, daddy?"

She said this very caressingly, and went close to Mr. Caringham and put up her face to be kissed, like a spoiled child.

"No, my darling; no," he answered, smiling at her as he kissed her.

"I thought not," she answered, with a merry laugh, adding, with assumed seriousness, "if I was very penitent, you know. But what is it? Has something gone wrong somewhere? Is it another of those horrid farms going to be empty? You'll tell me, Mr. Power, won't you?" she said, turning to him with a pretty gesture of supplication, "even if papa won't?"

The man would have done almost anything in the world she asked him; for in his quiet, reserved nature was a great fire of love for the girl. But he did not reply, leaving Mr. Caringham to answer.

"Well," said the latter, in a hesitating way, "the fact is, Maline, I have lost some money."

The girl changed her manner directly, and went to her father's side and put her arm in his as she said, in a way that showed the true womanly sympathy that was in her nature, and touched both men keenly :

"I hope it is not very serious, dear ;

not more serious than we can bear together."

And she took his hand in hers and kissed it.

"No, darling; no," said her father. "Not serious in amount; but disagreeable and disquieting in the way in which it has gone." And he told her what had happened.

"Yes, that is certainly very disagreeable, and I hate to be suspicious. Are you sure you put it in the drawer at all?"

"Yes, quite sure. Wilfred was here when I did so."

"What do you think about it, Mr. Power?" asked the girl.

"I do not know what to think; and you have made the puzzle greater."

"I!" said the girl, quickly, turning to him; "how is that?"

"Because, during the whole time since the money was put in the drawer, until the time of the discovery, the room seems to have been occupied first by me, then by you. I confess myself beaten."

"There must be some mistake somewhere. I should think you'll find the money, papa. But I must go and get my habit off. I will promise to be cautious about my things; but I have always left them about, and never lost a pennyworth of anything."

"Maline," said Mr. Caringham, calling her back for a moment and shutting the door, "be careful, my child, also, not to breathe a word about this in the house. I wouldn't have it get about for ten times the amount of the money."

"Very well, papa," she answered; "I'll not speak of it to a soul."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WILFRED FOUND IN THE LIBRARY.

THE comfort of the little household at the Grange was very much affected by the unpleasant incident of the theft of the money; and though each of the three who knew of it searched everywhere, and endeavoured to find some trace of it, no result followed.

Three days after the discovery, Mr. Caringham was called away on magisterial business to Quarter Sessions; and Wilfred shut himself up in the library, determined to finish some accounts which had given him some trouble.

At lunch, Maline told him she was going for a drive to the little town near, to make

some few purchases; and shortly after lunch she came into the library to him, dressed ready for starting, with her purse in her hand, to ask some trivial questions about some one in the town. She stayed a few minutes, until her pony carriage was announced, when they rose together and went out.

Wilfred stood a short time by the little carriage, while a suggestion of his was carried out: that, as Maline was going to drive, one of the ponies should be put on the curb instead of the snaffle. And then he watched her as she drove away down the avenue.

The first thing that caught his eye, when he went back to the library, was the purse that the girl had left on the table. He picked it up and ran out, thinking to call her back; but one of the maids, standing in his way in the hall rather clumsily hindered him, and the carriage was out of sight when he reached the steps.

He carried the purse back into the library and tossed it down on the table in a hurry to get on with his work. The catch was faulty, and the purse opened as it fell, one or two of the coins rolling out. He picked them up to replace them, and glanced, as he did so, into the purse.

To his amazement, he saw two French one-hundred franc notes, clumsily folded, lying in the purse. The number of one of them was on the top, and he could not help reading it.

It was the number of one of the stolen notes. He knew this because Mr. Caringham had given them to him to enter when they had been received some weeks before; and, after the theft, he had referred to the entry.

He closed the purse and placed it where it had been left by the girl. Then he sat down to think.

What could it mean? How came the stolen notes in the girl's possession?

He could do no work with that thought in his mind. More than that, he could not bear to be in the room when she returned for the purse. He hurriedly put his papers away, and went out into the air.

Could she have taken the money?

He tried his best to put the thought away from him as he hurried on as fast as he could walk along the roads; but it kept recurring with every corroborative circumstance that seemed to grow out of the strange discovery.

He was so absorbed that he noticed nothing; and, as he turned a sharp twist in

the lane, he would have been knocked down if he had not sprung quickly to the side when some one called to him out of a carriage which was being driven swiftly towards him.

It was Maline, and she pulled up sharply.

"Why, Mr. Power, I thought you were going to be at work?"

He looked up quickly and saw, or thought he saw, signs of anxiety in her face as she continued:

"I have left my purse at home, somewhere, and have to drive all the way back to find it."

"Why, would they not give you credit in Marshley?" he asked, trying to make his voice natural; but failing so much and appearing so constrained that the girl noticed it.

"It is not that; but there is something in the purse I particularly want: some patterns, and so on."

And again the man thought he could see that she was very anxious.

"You left the purse in the library," he said, looking at her. "I saw it after you had gone, and tried to catch you with it; but could not. You will find it there now."

This time he was certain that her manner showed confusion, as she gathered up the reins of the ponies and drove off, saying:

"Then I must make haste and fetch it. Good-bye."

A fierce struggle raged in the man's mind as he continued his walk for some hours through the woods and lanes; and when he reached the Grange, just before the dinner hour, he was disquieted and agitated.

He saw Maline in the drawing-room a few minutes before dinner. They were waiting for Mr. Caringham, who had come in later than usual; and he said to her:

"Did you find your purse all right?"

"Yes, thank you," she answered; but in a manner so completely different from her usual tone, that he looked at her in astonishment.

She returned the look steadily enough; but she seemed so serious and grave that he was startled.

"I am glad of that," he said.

"But I am afraid I disturbed your papers," she said, not looking at him, but staring out of the window, and speaking in a voice that trembled. "I knocked your blotting pad on to the floor and scattered the contents; but I tried to put

them back, as far as I could, in the same order."

"It is not of the least consequence," he answered. And then they said no more until Mr. Caringham came down, and they all went to dinner.

During the whole of that night Wilfred Power did not sleep. All the facts of the robbery—as he knew them, and as they were coloured by the light of the day's discovery—were reviewed by him, time after time.

The sight of the notes in the girl's purse; her evident anxiety to get back quickly from her drive to secure the purse; and her manifest trouble and agitation when he next saw her and asked her about it—a condition of mind that had lasted the whole evening—perplexed and confounded him.

Try as he would, he could not get away from the conviction which, though it at first had seemed impossible, had afterwards gathered weight: the conviction that she had, for some reason, taken the money.

Then he tried to think what must be the consequences to her of discovery. What would the father think of the child he almost idolised if he had to know her as a thief?

This thought pained him beyond measure.

He loved the girl with all the force of his nature, and the father had been to him as a father; had taken him when young and friendless, educated him, and treated him just as a son.

Could he do anything to avert the blow which he saw must fall upon Mr. Caringham if once the fearful truth were known?

Out of this thought grew a resolve that was quixotic, but quite characteristic of the man: he would endeavour to draw upon himself Mr. Caringham's suspicion, and so shield the girl.

He thought long and anxiously of the best means of doing this, without actually stating that he was the thief. And he decided to tell Mr. Caringham that he must go away, and to tell him in such a manner as to make him connect the departure with the theft.

He rose in the morning looking haggard and ill after the night of struggle, but firm in his resolve.

"I don't understand you, Wilfred," was Mr. Caringham's first comment, when the other told him he wished to go away. "What is it? What's the matter? What do you want?"

"I want nothing, except to go away."

"Well, but—my boy, I can't do without you. You are just like my son—the dear lad whose place you've taken. Do you mean you want to go away for good and all and leave the old Grange? Tell me, my lad, why?"

"I can't tell you why, Mr. Caringham."

"Can't tell me why, Wilfred, not after all these years?"

"No, I can't tell you," answered the other, keenly touched by the old man's words.

"But it's so sudden. Can't you wait awhile—give me a little time to prepare myself? It will be like losing the lad over again." Then he paused and added: "Are you in any trouble, my boy? I mean, have you got into any kind of scrape? Tell me, and I'll do all I can for you."

"No, Mr. Caringham. I have a trouble; but none you can help me through," answered Power.

"Is it—is it anything to do with Maline?" asked the old man.

This was a home-thrust, and made Wilfred wince.

"I thought you were such friends, and I hoped—but there, what's the good of hoping? Have you quarrelled, you two?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Caringham. It is nothing of that sort."

"Then, what is it? There must be something. It isn't— But there, I won't hurt you by even thinking that you are leaving because of this confounded business of the theft. You're not the lad to leave a place because there's a bit of a slur somewhere about it."

"Unless it were better that I should be away from it," answered Power, at a loss how to make the other suspicious of him.

"But it isn't better. Surely I know best about that. Why, if you were to go now, and this business were ever found out, people would say—by Heavens!—I don't know what they wouldn't say about you."

"Still, it might be best for me to go."

"How on earth could that be, lad?"

"Suspicion must fall on some one—and rightly," he added, in an undertone.

"Maybe; but not on you, my boy. Eh! what? What do you mean by that look? Speak out, boy; speak out," cried the old man, growing terribly eager in his anxiety at the other's manner.

"I cannot speak out. Even after these

years, I dare not. But I must go; and I must go without an explanation, and leave you to think what you will."

"Don't say any more now, Wilfred, unless you want to kill me outright. I don't quite know what you mean me to think; but you have roused such horrible thoughts that I can't bear any more now."

"Try not to think too hardly of me, for the sake of old times; and tell no one," said Power, as he went out of the room and closed the door gently behind him.

The old man laid his face in his hands as soon as he was alone, and murmured to himself in broken tones:

"A thief! A thief!"

He had rushed, like many people, from the one extreme of the impossibility of holding a suspicion to the other of absolute conviction.

He sat alone a long time, and then rang and sent a servant for Wilfred. She returned and said Mr. Power had gone out, but had left a letter.

He opened it with trembling hands.

"Before I go away, finally, I should like to see you once more. I shall return to Everleigh in three days for this purpose, and this purpose only. Try to explain my absence if you can, and grant my request for one more interview. I am going now to Overton.—W. P."

WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

THIS latest addition to the brotherhood of self-governing States bearing the British flag, has not a brilliant history. It is the Cinderella of the Australian colonies, and has suffered both from poverty and snubs. But now that it is developing from a Crown dependency into a full-blown colony with responsible Government, it will hold up its head with pride and hope among its sisters.

It is the giant of the Antipodean family, although a weakling. Its area covers quite one-third of the whole Australian continent. Put into figures, its acreage, including islands, exceeds one million square miles, and its coast-line stretches for some three thousand five hundred lineal miles. These are very big figures, and as indicative of space, they compare ridiculously with the population, which barely exceeds forty thousand—forty-two thousand was the last estimate.

From an Imperial point of view it possesses two distinct claims to our atten-

tion. It was the last of our distant possessions to which we deported the refuse of our prisons; and it is the last remnant of the Imperial heritage, available for our surplus population, over which the Imperial Government has retained a hold. The first concerns its history; the second, its potentiality. Let us take a look at both.

Although the colony of Western Australia now comprises all the Australian continent west of the hundred and twenty-ninth east meridian, and between the thirteenth and thirty-fifth south parallels, its germ was what was long known as the Swan River Settlement—away down in the south-west corner of the present territory, south of the thirtieth parallel. What is now called the Victoria District, however, between the twenty-eighth and thirtieth parallels, was the portion of the continent first discovered. This was by a Portuguese navigator, called Menezes, who seems to have visited Champion Bay, and who gave his name, Abrolhos, to a group of islands off that inlet. This was in 1527, and seventy years later the same islands were visited by Houtman, who added his own name to them. Twenty years later still, Francis Pelsart was shipwrecked on the same spot.

Further north again, between the twenty-sixth and twenty-fourth parallels, is the great indentation of Shark's Bay, which was discovered by a Dutchman in 1616, who gave the name of his pilot, Doore, to an island there. The Captain, Hartog, gave his own name to the whole bay and district; but after him came Dampier, who re-christened it Shark's. Another Dutchman discovered, and named, Cape Leeuwin in 1622; and yet another in, 1627, gave the name of Nuytsland to the coast eastward of that cape. Then, in 1628, De Witt discovered and named De Witt's Land; and seventy years later the entrance to the Swan River was discovered by Vlaming. King George's Sound was entered by Vancouver in 1791, and in 1801 Captain Flinders sailed in the "Investigator" along the south coast, and discovered and named numerous bays and islands. About the same time two French vessels were exploring the western coast, and in 1820-24 the northern coasts were explored and surveyed by Captain King for the English Government.

Such is a brief resumé of the early history of the land, which, it will be seen, was unvisited for nearly a century—from 1697 to 1791. In fact, until Captain Cook went to Botany Bay in 1770, Australia seems

altogether to have been forgotten by Europeans.

The first settlement in West Australia was in 1826. In that year a detachment of the Thirty-ninth Regiment, and some fifty convicts, were sent from Sydney to form a station at Albany, in King George's Sound. A few years later this pioneer settlement was transferred to what is now called Rockingham, a short distance south of the present port of Freemantle, on the west coast. Freemantle is at the mouth of the Swan River, and is so named after Captain Freemantle, of H.M.S. "Challenger," who hoisted the British flag there in 1829. This last act is supposed to mark the birth of the colony, which accordingly celebrated its jubilee in 1879.

The first settlement at the Swan River was made on the recommendation of the Governor of New South Wales, and was placed under the charge of Captain Stirling as Lieutenant-Governor. He took with him, besides his staff, about a dozen artisans, with their wives and families and servants, some fifty head of cattle, a couple of hundred sheep, thirty horses, and a number of pigs and poultry. A chaplain was sent after them, and the little community set to work to found a new England under the Southern Cross.

Within a year or so, some forty emigrant ships were sent to them from home, conveying altogether about one thousand one hundred and twenty new settlers, with goods and property to the value of one hundred and forty-five thousand pounds. To these pioneers the Government granted liberal tracts of land; and to these over-lavish gifts the misfortunes of the colony are said to be due. Most of the colonists were quite unfitted for the work of forming a new community, and most of them left in a short time in disgust. But they retained their land-rights, so that later arrivals, unable to find favourable localities near the settlement, had either to go further afield, or, as many of them did, depart to one of the other colonies where the attractions were greater.

In 1830, the city of Perth was founded, about twelve miles up the Swan River from Freemantle, and was made the capital and seat of Government. And here, even in 1830, as we learn from Mr. James Bonwick's recent interesting account of the early struggles of the Australian press, a newspaper was started. It was in manuscript, and a visitor of that year thus wrote of Freemantle:

"The town at present contains about a dozen wooden cottages, as many grass huts, one or two stone buildings, two hotels, several stores and shops, an auction-mart, a butcher's shop, where once a week fresh meat may be bought, and a baker's shop kept by a Chinaman, where unleavened bread is sometimes to be had. A newspaper called the 'Freemantle Journal,' in manuscript, is published weekly, which, like everything else, bears a very remunerative price. It is issued, only to subscribers, at ten guineas yearly subscription, and three shillings a copy on delivery."

This manuscript newspaper consisted of one foolscap sheet; but, even at the high charge made for it, does not seem to have paid, for it ceased to be issued in 1832. A very few years later, however, Byrne, in his "Wanderings," reported that he found no fewer than three flourishing newspapers in Western Australia, besides the "Government Gazette." He considered it very strange that this new colony should want one newspaper for every thousand of its inhabitants; but he thought that the fact spoke well "for the character of the people, for their desire for information and thirst after knowledge."

The difficulty, one would imagine, would be for the publishers to get advertisements, as well as subscribers; but even to-day it is doubtful if any colony has so many newspapers to so few people as West Australia has.

For the first ten years the colony made practically no progress, owing to the mistakes made in and with the first emigrants. About 1840 it began to pick up a little, under Governor Hutt, so that by 1848 the population was reported at four thousand six hundred and twenty-two, the land under cultivation at seven thousand and forty-seven acres, the horned cattle at ten thousand nine hundred, the sheep at one hundred and forty-one thousand one hundred and twenty, the horses at two thousand and ninety-five, and the goats at one thousand four hundred and thirty. By this time there were two banks in operation, and the external trade had grown to forty-five thousand four hundred pounds for imports, and twenty-nine thousand six hundred pounds for exports.

But what a bagatelle, after all, were these figures for a community claiming dominion over a million square miles! Evidently the colonists felt that something must be done to add to their numbers, for in 1850 they resorted to the heroic measure

of petitioning the Home Government to make the Swan River a convict settlement. The Home Government were only too delighted, and promptly sent them ship-load after ship-load, until when, in 1868, transportation ceased, about ten thousand convicts had been landed on its shores. No doubt many of these made their way, from time to time, to the Victorian gold-fields. But with these additions, and the natural increase of population, the colony has so far expanded as to have now over one hundred and six thousand acres under cultivation, and one hundred and six millions six hundred thousand acres held for pastoral purposes. It now owns two millions of sheep, ninety-five thousand eight hundred horned cattle, twenty-five thousand pigs, forty-one thousand four hundred horses, and four thousand goats; and it carries on trade with the outer world to the extent of about a million and a half sterling per annum.

It will thus be seen that this colony is not quite the "one-horse" affair people at home have been accustomed to consider it. This handful of forty thousand people must be a fairly industrious community to have done so much, and to have, besides, constructed seven hundred miles of railway, and four thousand miles of telegraph.

So far it has been what is called a Crown colony, with the officials, as well as the Governor, appointed by the Home Government, and with a single Legislative Chamber of twenty-six members, five of whom are nominated by the Governor, and the rest of whom must have freehold property of the value of one thousand pounds, and be elected by freeholders or leaseholders. Henceforward it hopes to manage its own affairs, like the other Australasian colonies, with two elective Chambers, a popular franchise, and the choice of its own Ministry and officials. Under the new constitution it is obtaining from the Imperial Parliament, it hopes to do wonders. Let us see, now, what are its capabilities.

In the first place, it must be remembered that a very large portion of its million square miles is, as far as at present known, wholly useless. Along the entire western coast there are ranges of hills of moderate altitude, and vast forests. Between these hills and the coast the land is, for the most part, fertile; but beyond the hilly and wooded districts is a vast interior, which is supposed to present nothing but a sandy and stony waste, all the way to the

borders of South Australia. It is possible, however, that the extent, or, at all events, the uselessness, of this desert tract has been exaggerated, because, in the extreme north and north-west, large, fertile tracts have been of late years discovered where sterility was formerly believed to prevail. These northern lands are said to be adapted not only for pastoral purposes, but also for the cultivation of sugar, coffee, and other tropical products; for, of course, the northern portion of the colony must be accounted as within the tropics.

There are numerous rivers along the north and western portions, although many of them are dry for a good portion of the year; but the only navigable stream within the settled portion of the colony is the Swan River. In this region, too, the whole of the uncultivated portion is said to consist of a vast forest of jarrah and white gum.

There are two distinct climates in the colony. That of the southern portion, say from Perth to Albany, is declared to be the most delightful and salubrious in the world—at least for nine months of the year, the other three months being hot during the day, although cool and pleasant at night. That of the northern portion, within the torrid zone, has always a high temperature, and an excessive summer heat, but with a remarkably dry atmosphere, which makes it more healthy than most tropical climates. It is to this northern portion that settlement is now being attracted by the discovery of gold, and the reputed existence of coal.

The climate of the middle portion of the colony is likened to that of Southern Italy and Spain; that of the southern portion to a warm dry English or French summer. The seasons are wet and dry, the former lasting from April to October. There are none of the long droughts experienced in this colony which work such havoc in other parts of Australia, nor are heavy floods common during the rainy season. Europeans are able to go about freely in all weathers and all seasons, without inconvenience, and epidemic diseases are almost unknown. On the other hand, consumptive persons have often taken a new lease of life in Western Australia. There is, indeed, a strong belief that Albany, in King George's Sound, will become a sanatorium in connection with our Indian empire, as it is only ten days' steaming from Ceylon, and it may even become a health-resort for English people.

The principal products of the colony so far, for export purposes, have been wool, hides, leather, tallow, oil, lead and copper ores, gum, pearl and pearl-shells, horses and sheep. The pearl fishery, which is on the north-west coast, is an old and a growing industry, employing many persons, and yielding about one hundred thousand pounds per annum at present.

But of the natural products of the colony, timber is by far the most important. Visitors to the Colonial Exhibition of 1886 could see specimens of the more valuable of the trees which abound in West Australia. The principal is the Jarrah, or Australian mahogany, which is one of the hardest and most durable woods known, being almost impervious to the action of insects and of water. Of this valuable tree, which grows to immense size, there are said to be quite fourteen thousand square miles. Next to it in nature is the Karri, most useful for building purposes, which grows to the height of three hundred feet, and also covers thousands of square miles. Then there is Sandal-wood, which for many years has been exported to China and India, but which has been rather ruthlessly destroyed in the localities most favourable for shipment. There were several other timbers exhibited in the West Australian Court at the "Colinderies," on which experts reported in high terms, and in which a lucrative trade is gradually developing. And these are the gifts of Nature, which only require to be gathered without the preliminaries of cultivation.

Vine-culture is to be one of the leading future industries of the colony, according to a recent authority who knows the land thoroughly. Australian wines are now well known in this country; but, so far, none have come from West Australia. But wine is being made there, and is declared to be very palatable and sound. With a little more experience, and the assistance of skilled wine-growers from Europe, the West Australians expect to be able to outdo their neighbours of Victoria. On the Darling range of hills, vineyards are multiplying steadily, and the grapes are said to be equal in flavour to those grown in English vineries.

As regards the soil and its capabilities, we may cite the authors of a recognised authority, the "Australian Handbook."

"The soil consists of vast tracts of sand and scrub, which is of little value; of much land suitable for sheep-grazing purposes

and for farming operations; and of extensive areas that will yet become available for the growth of the sugar-cane and other tropical productions. The eastern side of the Roe and Darling Ranges is specially suitable for the grazier and farmer. In the north, too, there are extensive grassy downs, capable of pasturing vast numbers of sheep and cattle. On the Lower Greenhough River, one flat alone contains ten thousand acres of very fine land, giving, with very slight exceptions, thirty bushels of wheat to the acre. The presence of poisonous plants is one of the greatest drawbacks to stock-raising in some parts of the country. The greater extent of the sea-board is separated from the interior by low ranges of hills running parallel to it, and covered with forests, principally of jarrah. The fertile land exists in patches, and some of it is of a very rich character. On the whole, the soil may be said to possess immense productive powers, but as yet under unfavourable circumstances. It is proposed to introduce the buffalo-grass, in order to utilise gradually the sandy tracts. Couch, or doob-grass, has been largely introduced for paddocks. It thrives abundantly, grows upon the poorest soil, and, in the hottest and driest weather, affords substantial pasture."

West Australia is, in the southern portion, essentially a land of fruit. There apples, pears, peaches, plums, figs, almonds, olives—every fruit, indeed, of the temperate zone, grow to perfection, and with little effort. The distance is too great for these fruits to be sent fresh to European markets, but an industry is possible in preserved fruits.

There is no doubt, however, that the colonists are resting high hopes of future prosperity on the gold deposits they believe they possess, but of which until lately the country was supposed to be devoid. Mr. Woodward, the Government geologist, has reported the existence of rich mineral belts from one end of the colony to the other. Rich lodes of lead and copper have long been known in the region of Champion Bay; and lead and copper ores have been for some time regular exports. Something has been attempted, but not successfully, although the Government offered a bonus of a pound a ton for the first ten thousand tons of lead smelted in the colony. Still, its day will come.

Gold was first discovered on the Irwin River, and on the first report there was a great rush of diggers. The quantity was

not great, and most of the miners left in disgust. It was next found near Albany, and a year or two ago also at Newcastle, in the eastern district. But the greatest finds have been in the Kimberly district, in the north of the colony. There was a great rush to this district for a time, and although many of the diggers again left, swearing at the colony, some rich discoveries have since been made, and Kimberly is being added to the list of steady gold-producing regions of the world. It is, however, obtained by reefing, not by washing, and is not the place for the sudden making of splendid fortunes, like the Victorian diggings in their palmy days. Companies with capital are erecting crushing machinery; and very handsome yields are reported. About a thousand men are now employed in the new gold-fields, and the exports in 1888 were estimated at fifty thousand ounces.

Coal has also been found in two or three places, and is now being worked; and within the last two years several companies have been formed for tin-mining. Altogether, the mineral wealth of the country is proving very great, if not so great as that of Victoria and New South Wales.

Perth, the capital, is a well-laid-out city of some ten thousand inhabitants, beautifully situated, and well supplied with numerous public buildings, churches, clubs, schools, banks, etc. It is connected by railway and river-steamer with Freemantle, the chief port of the colony. This is a busy little place of some five thousand inhabitants, with a moderately good harbour, and a considerable export and import trade. Albany is located in one of the finest harbours on the whole Australian coasts; and it is predicted that King George's Sound will become not only an intercolonial harbour-of-refuge, but also a great naval station for Imperial, as well as for colonial, purposes.

Such, then, are some of the features and possibilities of the new addition to the honourable roll of British self-governing colonies. Our sketch has been necessarily rapid, but enough has been said to show that, although the past of Western Australia has not been brilliant, she has yet the making of a great colony. In her enormous area, much of which has never been trodden by the foot of white man, there must be room and to spare for tens of thousands of our own crowded millions.

KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

By ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "*Muriel's Marriage*," "*Joan Vellacot*," "*A Fair's Damself*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

No wonder that outsiders were puzzled by the unusual apathy that reigned at Rushbrook House with reference to Elva Kestell's marriage to Walter Akister. Ever since the day when she had consented, she had never—except to go to church—set foot outside the grounds of Rushbrook, and she had allowed no one to mention her marriage to her but Amice and her mother. From her mother, indeed, she tried to hide her motives; but with Amice she could not succeed, till she had decidedly and sternly forbidden the subject to be again mentioned between them.

Walter had come down to Rushbrook, summoned there by a letter from Mr. Kestell. He had found the old man kindness itself, settlements were soon agreed upon, and the pale, benevolent face of Mr. Kestell was lit up with true joy when he said:

"Akister, my dear fellow, I see that yours is indeed true, disinterested love; I believe you would marry Elva even if she were poor."

"I would," said Walter, decidedly; "I shall have enough for both. If"—he was suddenly fixed with the idea that Kestell of Greystone, might, after all, not be the rich man he was supposed to be, and that it was for this reason that mean scoundrel had made off—"if, Mr. Kestell, you have the least reason for not wishing to settle anything on your daughter at this moment please say so, I shall not mind in the least, neither will my father. Elva and I can wait till we are older to enjoy riches. We want so little for ourselves; and she loves you, I know, better than herself."

Mr. Kestell was at his knee-hole table, and he lifted his pale blue eyes to the lover's face. There was nothing prepossessing in the young man's appearance, the habitual scowl seemed even more pronounced than usual; but in his words there was much that was honest and noble. Even now the old man paused; was this another door opened to him, one more chance of escaping from these haunting thoughts that were slowly, as it seemed, killing him?

Here was one who loved Elva enough to send everything to the winds for her sake. Everything—even honour! Ah! if he could be sure of that, if he were certain that—No, he could not be sure, so he rose and grasped Walter's hand with more than his accustomed fervour, and said:

"Walter, your words prove you to be all I could wish. As to money, we will leave your lawyer to settle that. I—I will settle any sum in reason he likes to name on her; but let the wedding be soon, very soon, I am far from well, and mortals must not trifle with time."

"Soon—Mr. Kestell, I would it were to-morrow; but I must let Elva decide. You know she wrote to me; perhaps I might see her now for a few minutes. Otherwise I shall respect her wishes; she wishes to be left to herself till our wedding day. It is all nonsense about getting well acquainted; we have known each other from childhood."

"You are very generous, Walter; it is not every man who would respect her wishes."

"What care I?" he muttered. "When she is my wife she must love me, must put up with me at least."

Mr. Kestell led the way to the morning room, he knew Elva was there; he opened the door with a trembling hand and called out:

"Elva, dearest. Here is Walter."

Elva rose and came forward. Her father was gone, and had shut the door before Walter hastily approached her. She held out her hand; but she would not let him kiss her.

"I told papa I would see you now, to-day, Walter; and then you know what I said in my note."

"Yes," he answered, sullenly.

"I want to be quite sure you understand. I want to say it now, and then we need never mention it again—never——"

"As you like," he said, with a gleam of intense passion in his eyes, though his words were cold like hers.

"You have heard that my happiness was wrecked. For some reason, which I do not know, the man I loved broke off our engagement. I have never seen him again. Papa tells me I never shall. I cannot see how it can be possible. But I do love him still—I believe I told you so, Walter—and I shall never love another as I loved him. I do not love you; but I am touched that you should care for some one who is—— Well, as for me, I am

marrying you because papa wishes it intensely, and I love him better than any one else in the world now. I am not deceiving you, Walter; never reproach me with that."

"I never will. You are not deceiving me."

"Won't you reconsider your wish? Think, Walter, how much happier you could be if—if your wife loved you."

"I shall look after my own happiness," he said, biting his lip to keep in stronger expressions.

"Remember that, when I am your wife, I shall know how to make people respect you; but that I shall never pretend to more. And, and—oh, Walter, won't you think better of it again? Won't you give me up now—now, before it is too late?"

"By Heaven, I won't!" he said, fiercely.

"Do you think that now I have proved to you the falseness of that man, now that you see how utterly unworthy he was to marry you, do you imagine that now I shall give you up? Why didn't you say yes when I first asked you? Why did you let me go through that other time?"

The ill-restrained force of the unchecked nature might have attracted some women. Elva only shrank from it as she would have done had she seen molten iron issuing from the imprisoning furnace. To her mind Love was not to be thus desecrated; for it was too beautiful a thing to be sullied with rude passion. She shrank away a little farther from him.

"I have suffered a great deal," she said, with the quietness of despair. "I can hardly bear any more. Good-bye now, till—that day. Remember, if—if you ever feel any doubt, say so, and I shall understand. I can face what people will say now," she added, with a smile so utterly sad that Walter turned away.

"You need not fear that I shall throw you over," he said, taking her hand and grasping it. "What do I care for the gossip of idle women? Some women's tongues are full of envy, some of them think you are a jilt; and if you were, I would still marry you, Elva."

She motioned him away. This personal possession, which he seemed alone to care for, not only frightened her, but repelled her. She experienced the feeling that, if he stayed much longer in the room, she would fling all her previous reasoning to the winds, and tell her father she could not accomplish the sacrifice she was making for him. Why was he so very, very

anxious to see her married? Why was she not a Roman Catholic, that she might fly to a convent and rest? Why was her love for her father so great that, for his sake, she had done this thing?

"Please go now, Walter," she said.

Walter had a moment's impulse to disobey her; but she was going to be his own so soon, he could humour her for a little while longer. Women were like that, so fickle and uncertain.

"We shall have time enough to talk during our honeymoon," he said, sullenly; and then he walked away without once looking back.

Left alone, Elva remained plunged in dumb misery. She did not feel as if she were the same Elva as she had been; she was some one else; she was speaking, walking, acting in a dream—a hideous dream; the daily events now made no impression on her mind. The last thing she distinctly remembered was telling her father she would do as he wished—she would marry Walter. Constantly she seemed mentally to be going to her father and saying the same thing:

"Papa, for your sake I will, for your sake."

If now and then she struggled into new consciousness, it was merely to experience a feeling of such fear and dread at what she was going to do, that she had at once to seek out Amice or her mother, and begin talking on indifferent matters.

This, of course, always turned on the wedding preparations. Mrs. Kestell once more began throwing herself into the preparations, only remarking:

"I hope, Elva, this time there will be no more jilting. I shall never show my face again in the neighbourhood if you throw over another lover. As it is, I see Mrs. Eagle Bennison looks upon you as a very badly brought-up young lady. Then the Fitzgeralds—all their long letters of sorrow make me see well enough how rejoiced they are that, after all, one of you will not be first married. Louisa has engaged herself to that decrepit Hungarian Count, so that she may be married first and be called Countess. I have told your aunt that as the Honourable Mrs. Akister you will hold a better position in society than any foreigner can hope to fill."

No; Elva made no allusion to herself. This time she was tied and bound to be married to Walter Akister, a man she had once despised and laughed at, but whom she was now beginning to fear.

She took no trouble with her trousseau; indeed, most of it lay ready prepared for female admiration. Wedding presents came, a little fitfully, as if to remind Elva that she was said to have jilted her last lover, or, at all events, had given no rightful explanation of her change of purpose.

Amice answered the notes, that was the only thing she could do, having now accepted the doom. To see Elva suffer was far harder than suffering herself. But what could she do as the days passed by so quickly, and as every hour brought them nearer to the wedding-day?

Mr. Kestell was the one decidedly cheerful member of the family. Elva did not notice that his cheerfulness was forced; she accepted his verdict that her marriage was going to cure him of his sleeplessness, and of all his ailments; so she forced herself to smile and to appear cheerful, as she sat with him in his study, whilst he talked to her of his boyhood, and of his parents, whom Elva had never known.

The past was a relief to them both. For the time being it almost blotted out the present.

But Elva could be obstinate about some things. Not even her father's gentle remonstrance could make her wear Walter's engagement-ring of diamonds; nor would she go and pay visits to rich or poor. She sauntered in the garden on her father's arm, but nothing more; neither would she see any one who called. To Mr. Kestell she said:

"Papa, I want to give you every minute of my last home days."

But to herself she repeated:

"I know they are curious about my feelings; they want to probe my motives, but they shall not. That pain I need not have, for how can I be sure that I should not say right out how much I dislike marrying Walter, and that it is simply for papa's sake? Will Hoel see the announcement? What will he think? Why did he not come to me? Hoel, Hoel, my only love, what did I do to displease you?"

And so the day drew very near. There were but two days now. It was Tuesday, and the wedding was to be at half-past two o'clock on Thursday; Elva had begged for that hour in order to avoid the wedding breakfast. Rushbrook House was to be thrown open, and a general squash and tea-party was to announce that Miss Kestell of Rushbrook House had been united to Lord Cartmel's only son.

Mr. Kestell's delicate state of health was excuse enough for avoiding a breakfast; and the tea was to consist of every choice fruit, and every possible hospitality to make up for the disappointment of speeches.

Happily when money is of no consideration, trouble is much minimised; and Amice, who wrote all the notes, was the only one of the family who felt the burden of the approaching wedding.

Amice was in a strange state just then. Elva was too much occupied with her own burden of sorrow to notice this, as she otherwise would have done; all her actions seemed mechanical. She was always at work, but it was because she made almost superhuman efforts not to give way. Formerly she had leant on Elva, now she knew she must keep up; formerly she would have retired to her room, and on her knees she would have prayed that the curse might pass away. Now she had to write notes. She had to interview tradespeople, dressmakers. She had to go out to the cottages and help Miss Heaton about the clothing of the regiment of maidens who were to line the churchyard path as Elva walked up, and were to strew white flowers for the bride to step on.

And Amice did all this, but all the time she was conscious that this busy, active Amice was not the real one. Her true self was a far different person; a girl who felt that she was under a mysterious power of which she could not explain the nature. She seemed to see, oh so terribly clearly, just as if it were revealed to her, every pang that Elva experienced, and which made her miserable. She could divine her sister's shrinking from her self-imposed task; and from this she could easily deduce the future misery of the being she loved most on earth.

"And yet," thought Amice, "I warned her long ago against Walter Akister, and she did not understand me; I did not understand it myself. Heaven sends me these warnings as a punishment, for they are useless, utterly useless — and that other warning, oh, what is it? What is it?"

Amice put her hand over her burning eyes as if she would force back the new image. Image, no, it was not that exactly; it was as if her eyeballs were burning in their sockets, as if the great pain this caused her spread a misty veil of red over everything she looked at; as if this red colour sickened her, and caused her to long intensely to rush away out of the house.

But when she did so the pain and dim red mist followed her, the air came like hot wind from a furnace, upon her forehead; the sickening thought that she was losing her mind would present itself to her, and yet she could go through all the daily duties with perfect clear-sightedness without a mistake. Only in prayer could Amice find relief, and time for prayer was not easy to get where the hours before the wedding could now be counted.

But one whole day before she should lose her sister! The realisation of this swept like a bitter destructive wave over Amice. Only now she seemed to understand that she had done nothing to save Elva, but that she had accepted the decision calmly. Yet how to act when the whole heart is sick, and when the brain appears about to pass over the narrow border which divides sanity and insanity. Amice fancied the air was oppressive; she fancied that it was not her own fault that she could not breathe, when all around was bathed in that dull-red colour. Did it appear so to every one else, or was it only to her—to her that the curse had come? Or were these the signs of some illness that was about to attack her?

Should she ask Elva's advice? No, it would be cruel; she must bear it alone; it was braver not to burden others with her fears, especially Elva, who was in such sore trouble already. Life was, after all, not such a simple thing as it had appeared to her and Elva when, as children, they wandered over their beloved heathy hills. No, life was a network of fearful responsibilities, the skeins of which were always becoming entangled; and those who tried to unwind the tangles only made matters worse.

Suddenly Amice started up; she had forgotten where she was, till Jones's matter-of-fact voice recalled her with his deep-toned:

"Dinner is on the table."

It was their last dinner together as a family. Amice remembered this now, and knew she had been dreaming. Was it dreaming, or reality? Behind the curtain, on the low window seat, Elva, in a black dress, which strongly brought out the paleness of her face, had been sitting at her father's feet, with her hand in his, whilst Mrs. Kestell knitted, and spoke now and then about her new nurse, who had captivated her by much sympathy with supposed ailments.

Amice knew she was certainly quite

awake now, even though the dull-red colour remained.

"Our darling's last dinner," said Mr. Kestell. "Dearest, you will come in, won't you?" he added, turning to his wife.

"Yes; Amice, give me your arm. It is fortunate you are not going to be married. Josiah, go on with Elva, and let me see how well she can take a position as lady of the house."

"The Honourable Mrs. Akister!" said Mr. Kestell, playfully, excitedly almost. "I am sure the array of presents in the big library is enough to furnish a palace. You will quite change the character of the observatory. We shall have fine doings there this summer."

"You must come and see me every day, papa, or else I shall come here. Both I expect."

Before Jones and the footman the conversation was chiefly about presents. Elva had wonderful power over herself, she was like a man going to execution; the last pride left to her was to show no white feather before the callous and heartless crowd.

After dinner, Mrs. Kestell retired to her room, and Amice went with her; but she was soon dismissed in favour of the new treasure. Where should she go? The oppression of every room increased, however. Elva might want her, so she ran down to the drawing-room, where her sister had been singing a favourite song to Mr. Kestell. Seeing Amice, she rose and went to meet her, and drawing her gently to her father, said softly, with a voice full of tears, and yet that struggled against emotion:

"Papa, I leave you Amice; you will soon find out how much better she is than I am."

Amice's large blue eyes dilated as Mr. Kestell raised his to them. Every nerve

in her body seemed to stiffen, her voice refused to speak; an overpowering breathlessness took possession of her, and the dull-red haze blotted out her father's face. She wrenched her hand away from Elva's arm.

"Let me go, dear, let me go. I don't feel well; I must have some air. Don't come with me, don't follow me. Stay with papa."

Then she escaped. She shut the drawing-room door as if she feared pursuit; she snatched a hat and shawl as she crossed the hall; then, opening the front door, she hurried out. She must get air—air. She must get away from herself and from that.

Down the drive and across the road and on to the bridge; and there, in another moment, she stood face to face with Jesse Vicary.

That brought her back to mundane thoughts when, straight and gaunt, he stood before her. His broad shoulders, mysteriously defined in the half-light—for it was still light—looked powerful, his very demeanour was new and strange, as indeed was his voice when he spoke.

"Miss Kestell, may I see your father? Or, rather, to do away with shams, I must see him."

His tone of authority displeased Amice.

"You have chosen badly. It is my sister's last evening at home. To-morrow is her wedding-day."

"Excuse me, I waited till to-day to come."

Again Amice felt that she was the culprit.

"Do you want me to announce you?"

"I don't care. I must see Mr. Kestell."

"Come, then. You will find out for yourself that he cannot see you."

"The time of cannot is past; now it is must," he muttered half to himself as he followed her.